

Duolingo: Playing While Learning?

A UX Research Study on
Gamification Features

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The Duolingo Dilemma

01

Popularity.

The world's #1 language app, celebrated for its game-like design and minimalist interface.

02

The Hypothesis.

An intense focus on gamification may come at the cost of deep, instructional 'lecture content.'

02

The Core Question.

Does the 'game' support or overshadow the 'learning'?



Our Two-Pronged Investigation

The Expert Review



01 Method:
Heuristic Evaluation

02 Who: 2 long-term, expert users

03 Framework: Nielsen's 10 Heuristics, augmented with custom principles for 'Fun & Enjoyment' and 'User Loyalty.'

The Novice Experience



01 Method:
Usability Testing

02 Who: 2 first-time users learning a new language (French)

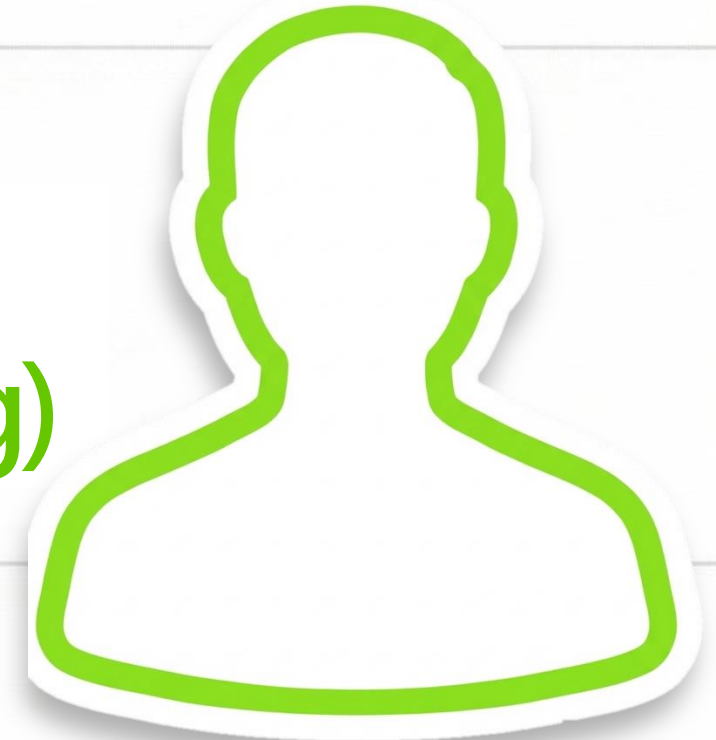
03 Technique: "Think-Aloud" protocol to capture unfiltered, real-time feedback.

Perspectives: The Veteran & The Rookie

The Veterans (Expert Review)



The Rookies (Usability Testing)



- 01** **User A:** 1.5 years of usage, current user.
- 02** **User B:** Former user, quit after a broken streak.

- 03** **User C:** No prior French experience.
- 04** **User D:** No prior French experience.

Veteran's Verdict: Depth Over Dailies

01 No Big Picture

Inability to track overall progress or review a complete list of mastered vocabulary.

02 Feedback Without Context

Errors are corrected but never explained, missing crucial grammar lessons. Users are forced to Google answers.

03 The Stress of the Streak

Gamification evolves from a motivator into a source of anxiety, distracting from the learning goal.



"I want to do this to learn languages, but now I'm just doing it to keep the streak going. It wasn't satisfying."

Rookie's Reality: A Confusing First Day

01 Disorienting Start

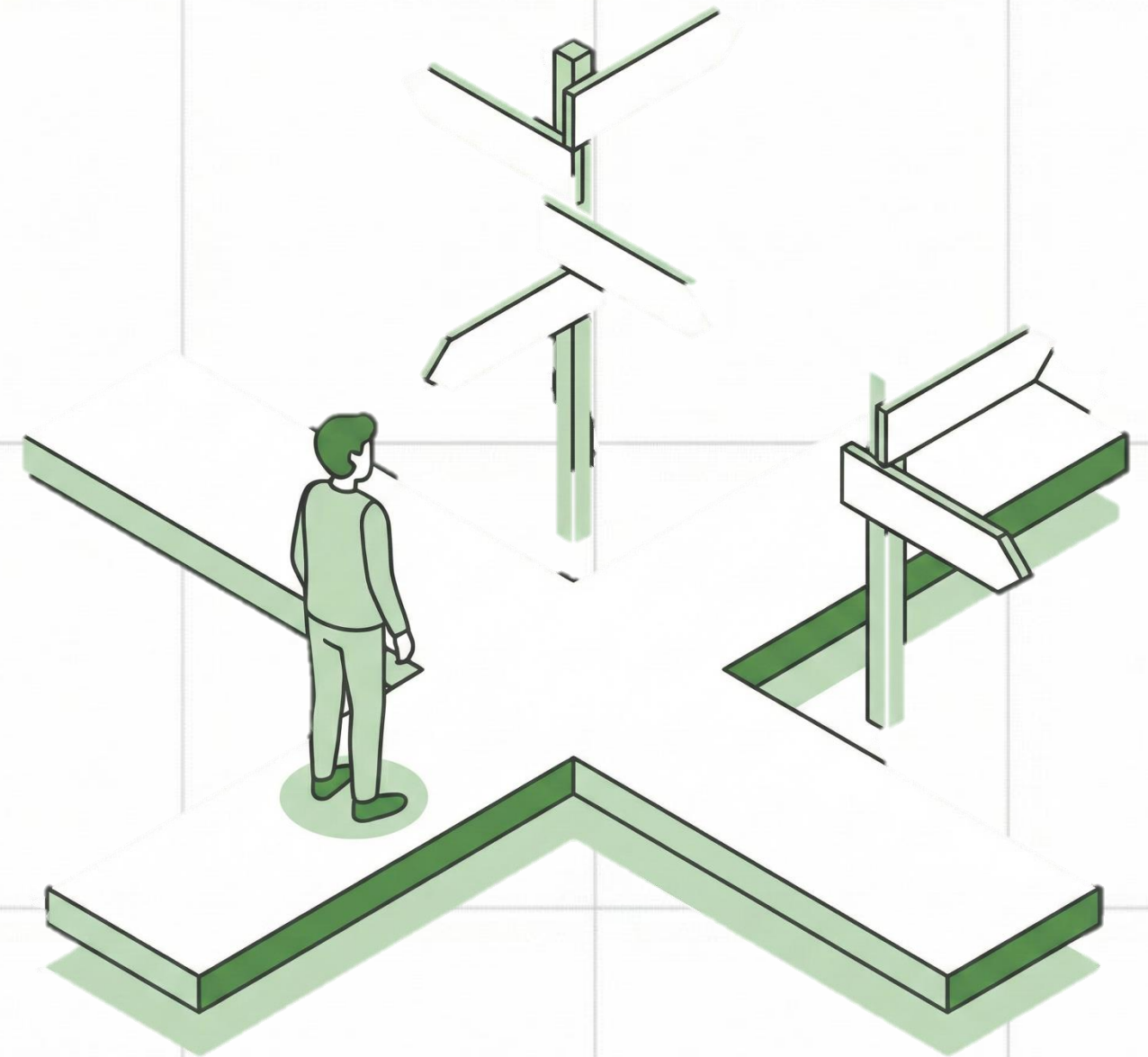
Users were 'startled' to be thrown directly into a lesson with no tutorial, homepage, or orientation.

02 Ambiguous Icons

Key UI elements (like the headphone icon) lack labels. Forcing users to guess their function.

03 No Easy Undos

Frustration in sentence-building tasks due to the lack of a clear correction or 'undo' function after a mistake.



The Core Insight: The Grammar Gap

The **Unifying Problem**: A severe lack of foundational content—specifically **Grammar** rules and a personal Dictionary—was identified by BOTH user groups.

Impact on Rookies:

Lessons felt like a 'waste of time,' relying on guessing, not understanding.

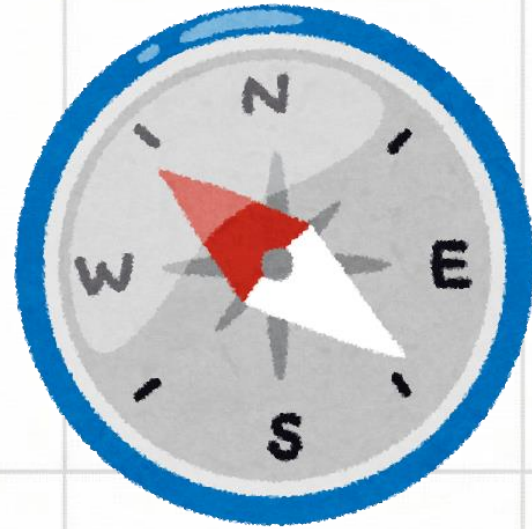


Impact on Veterans:

Forced to leave the app and use Google to understand their own mistakes.

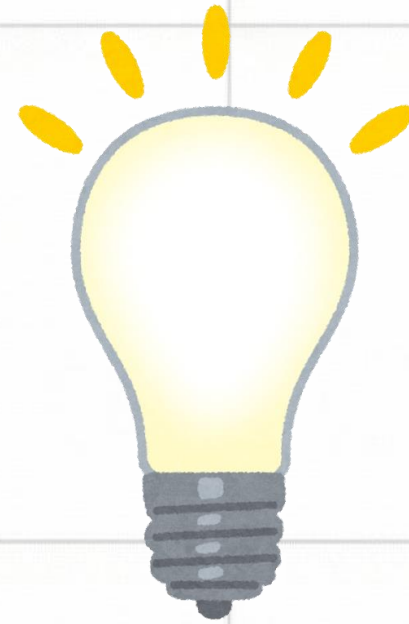
The app excels at *quizzing* but fails at *teaching* the fundamental structure of a language.

Recommendations: Building the Bridge



01 Guided Onboarding

Implement a tutorial or 'guided tour' to introduce the UI and lesson structure *before* the first test begins.



02 Actionable Feedback

When an error occurs, provide concise, contextual grammar explanations, not just the correct answer.



03 A knowledge Hub

Create a dedicated section for Grammar Notes and a Personal Dictionary for review and self-study outside the main game loop.

Conclusion: From Gamified App to Learning Companion



Today: Duolingo's gamification successfully drives engagement but creates barriers to deep learning.

The Barriers: For novices, a lack of guidance. For experts, a lack of depth.

The Future: To achieve long-term retention, the app must evolve from a 'game that teaches' into a 'learning tool that is fun.'